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National Student Group

Secretly Aided by CIA

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The Standard Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Central Intelligence Agency secretly helped form the National Student Association in 1947 to create a "credible" anti-Communist voice among youngsters attending international meetings, it was learned Tuesday.

The CIA, which spent \$200,000 a year on the student association in the post-war period and the 1950s, gave instructions to some American students attending these conferences and "debriefed" them on their return home, association sources disclosed.

The CIA further sponsored scholarships to bring foreign students here from underdeveloped nations and helped finance NSA tours abroad, the sources said.

These ties binding the government's major spy agency to the nation's oldest and largest organization of college students were learned after Ramparts Magazine published advertisements for its March issue in two eastern newspapers.

The ads promised accounts of "How the CIA has infiltrated and suoverted the world of American student leaders" and how "it has used students to spy."

W. Eugene Groves, NSA president, denied that officers or employees of the association, which represents student governments at 300 colleges and universities, knowingly performed "intelligence functions" for the CIA.

He issued a statement acknowledging receipt of CIA funds, however, saying they "supported a number of projects assisting student groups abroad and promoting international understanding on American campuses."

Groves said he has been quietly trying to eliminate CIA funds from the NSA's \$825,000 annual budget for about two years. The

CIA contributed only about \$50,000 last year.

The NSA was formed by about 25 American students who attended a meeting of student organizations in Prague in 1946. The NSA's own constitutional convention was held the next year at the University of Wisconsin.

Early NSA leaders came primarily from Catholic colleges. They were considered liberal in most policies, but strongly anti-Communist.

A former NSA leader said the initial group "wanted to find alternatives to communism." They attended numerous conventions of students in eastern and western Europe to promote the democratic process.

The CIA provided funds from the start, he said. The agency refused to discuss the issue at all today, referring reporters to the State Department — a highly unusual procedure.

A State Department official said the CIA support began in a period "when Communist students were well financed and got support from their governments while American students were handicapped by a lack of funds."

The funds were channeled through the CIA, he said, because "overt support of the NSA abroad would have destroyed its integrity. Its credibility as a free spokesman would have been impugned from the outset."

He added that this arrangement "was satisfactory to both parties."

The CIA's role in NSA affairs dwindled gradually. By the late 1950s, even many of the association's leaders did not even know of the CIA connection.

Last year, for example, William Werdell was assistant to the NSA president. He said he

did not find out about the CIA until three weeks ago, when the NSA heard about the forthcoming Ramparts story.

Werdell said he now suspects that he inadvertently was in charge of a CIA operation three years ago which sent an integrated group of American jazz musicians on a tour of Africa. He was told at the time that funds came from a private group of businessmen, but now he says "that doesn't add up."

In the past three or four years only a handful of NSA leaders knew of the CIA connection. The State Department said the number was two. NSA sources said the number was closer to half a dozen.

The president, who serves a one-year term, always passed the word about the CIA to his successor. Other officers frequently did not. Only a few of the NSA's 50 staff members were aware of the CIA's support.

About three years ago the NSA started a major fund drive to broaden the base of its support.

"Most of us had been active in student government or student newspapers," Werdell said. "We all knew of the danger of one source of support."

The NSA now receives funds from such organizations as the Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, New World Foundation and the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO.

Groves recently met with Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey in an effort to tap new funds from public and private agencies.

He also talked last month with Douglass Cater, a special assistant to President Johnson, and asked how he should act if the CIA ties were disclosed.

Cater said Tuesday that Groves told him the CIA money was being terminated. "It was the first I'd heard of it and there wasn't anything for me to do about it," Cater said.

During the day NSA leaders tried to audit books while preparing for an emergency meeting of their 10-member board of directors. The board is to conduct a "thorough investigation" in the next few days and issue a report.

The NSA actually does not have individual student members. It is a confederation of college and university student governments which join by their own vote and pay annual dues. Delegates from the 300 member schools meet at a national student congress each August.

The NSA has adopted resolutions calling for the abolition of the House Un-American Activities Committee, admission of Communist China to the United Nations, cessation of the bombing in North Vietnam, and inclusion of the Viet Cong in negotiations for a cease fire.

Most NSA members wandering in and out of their headquarters in a three-story stone townhouse here were baffled by the affair.

One pointed quizzically to a blue poster on the back of the front door which announced a tour of Japan, Hong Kong and Korea sponsored "through a grant from the Department of State."

"I wonder what that really means," he said.